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4 March 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Station Comments on GVN Actions and Performance

1. The Station's reply to our questions (copies of both attached hereto) can be summarized as follows:

a. Measures and tasks needed to meet immediate crisis must be carefully discriminated from those related to solving long-standing (but not immediately critical) problems.

b. On balance, GVN performance in immediately critical areas is generally adequate, though far from outstanding. Station is cautiously optimistic that GVN performance in these areas will continue to improve.

c. US must not dilute GVN energies among diverse tasks but, instead, must help the GVN focus on the really critical. US should also avoid pushing solutions requiring drastic GVN reorganization or major reorientation of resources.

2. Station's ranking of specific critical tasks and summary of Station comments on current GVN performance therein are as follows:

a. Protect seats of GVN authority and key military installations.

Saigon Comment: This being accomplished, at least marginally. No key locale lost to the enemy but many are subject to repeated harassment or threatened with imminent ground attack. ARVN's performance has varied widely but has improved in recent days.

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b. Insure adequate (as distinct from optimum) performance by GVN military and civil elements in meeting current crisis.

Comment: At national (Saigon) level, there are signs GVN is recovering from initial shock and beginning to move adequately. President Thieu has begun to exert some leadership [redacted]

[redacted] Thang's assignment gives some hope for IV Corps. Other corps commands seem marginal or adequate. Performance varies at province level, with US advisory effort in some places compensating for unsatisfactory GVN local performance. Little information from district.

c. Relieve suffering created by enemy attacks.

Comment: GVN is coping more or less adequately.

d. Rally populace against the enemy and restore confidence in GVN and loyalty to the state.

[redacted]

e. Counter the enemy's effort to destroy pacification and dominate rural areas.

Comment: GVN performance marginal in terms of pushing assets back out into field. GVN feels, with reason, first priority must be given to protecting towns and cities. All Mission components are pushing the line that a good offensive is the best defensive, with some response in some areas. General Ky's assignment to survey this problem and make recommendations is an encouraging step forward.

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3. Headquarters Comment:

The Station's cable is, as advertised, a preliminary response that does not answer our questions in sufficient detail. The over-all picture it conveys is a GVN hanging on, but barely. We also get the impression, perhaps unfairly, that our colleagues (like the rest of the US Mission) are tired and a trifle defensive in their response to Washington's needles. We believe that though the GVN's capacities are obviously limited, the real root problem is more one of atmosphere and attitude than sheer ability. The key person here is Thieu. Unless he can be persuaded to galvanize the situation or allow others (e.g., Ky) to do so ostensibly in his name, prospects for improved GVN performance are bleak. If Thieu will start acting like a war president in time of crisis, however, there could be significant improvement in a number of fields in a short span of time. The difficulty lies partly in Thieu's make-up and primarily in the fact that he does not yet appear to appreciate the urgency and seriousness of the crisis with which the government he heads is faced, or the fact that this is a crisis out of which the US Government could be unable to bail him (even if it were willing to mount an all out try) unless he and his Vietnamese colleagues really do their full share.

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Attachments

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